

VII. PRIORITIZATION OF NEEDS AND PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

A. Prioritization of Needs

The Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan is intended to serve as a tool to help guide future decisions regarding park facilities and leisure programs for College Station. Section VII is included to provide the prioritization of the needs identified in **Section VI** and to offer a plan to address those needs over a multi-year period.

The identified needs can be divided into two major categories: 1) Those existing needs that are not currently being addressed; and, 2) Those needs that are anticipated to occur as a result of future population growth. The City of College Station places the highest priority on meeting the existing needs of the community while recognizing the importance of anticipatory planning and preparation for the city's expected future growth.

The successful acquisition of numerous key tracts of land over the past several years has now placed a higher emphasis on the development of those sites into usable park and recreation facilities. However, there are still some specific needs for additional land in certain areas. This includes neighborhood park sites in several Park Zones and the acquisition of a site for a second municipal cemetery, which is the responsibility of the Parks and Recreation Department.

The subcommittee that was charged with the development of this master plan determined that identified needs must be prioritized. The committee used information that had been gathered during the extensive planning process, along with input received during the 1998 Capital Improvement Program campaign, to develop a list of general areas of need. This list was incorporated into the original document and has served as a guide for capital improvements planning, project implementation, and leisure program emphasis during this period.

The revision of the plan has included a review and update of the priorities related to the identified needs. This prioritization is based upon the accomplishments over the past five years; existing program and facility needs; and anticipated growth trends. The following general categories represent our current priorities:

- 1. Softball program development**
- 2. Soccer program development**
- 3. Indoor recreation facility development**
- 4. Trails acquisition and/or development**
- 5. Natural area acquisition and/or management**
- 6. Neighborhood park acquisition and/or development**
- 7. Community park acquisition and/or development**

The department traditionally adjusts priorities in accordance with identified community needs and user requests. These are usually priorities that are identified by concerned citizens, the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board or the City Council throughout the year and during the annual strategic planning process. Several notable examples include the development of the Kids Klub After School Enrichment Program in response to concerns related to "latch-key children" in the community; inclusion of a local competitive swim team into city

facilities; the development of teen programs and a teen center; and programs and activities for senior populations. Many of these efforts are supported through special committees, board meetings, and other methods of public input to ensure that the intent of the requests are fully analyzed and the needs are correctly identified prior to committing public resources.

Priorities have also been identified for park and recreation programming and operational support. As the population grows, the need for expansion of existing programs, as well as the development of new programs, must be addressed. One key aspect related to the provision of leisure programs is the automation of the information and registration process. Funding to acquire and implement software and hardware is included in the FY 2002 budget. The stated goal is to have registration services automated by October 1, 2004. This will greatly enhance the public's ability to access these services by means of telephone and internet. In addition, the new softball and soccer facilities will provide a means to enhance the services for both youth and adult programs.

To address a major concern regarding an improved level of service, the City Council approved Park Maintenance Standards in FY 2001. These standards establish specific criteria for all park facilities and they are evaluated on a quarterly basis. The stated goal of the program is to achieve a 90% or higher rating on all categories within five years. The overall average rating at the end of the first year (FY 2002) was 81%. This indicates that the program is on track to meet the established goals by FY 2006. Key areas of deficiency will be reviewed on an annual basis and additional resources allocated as required to make needed improvements.

To support the anticipated growth in leisure programs and recreation facilities, priorities for maintenance shops, equipment, and personnel to support these expanding services must be established. The addition of a small shop and dedicated crew at Veterans Park was included with the completion of the Phase I project. This facility is designed to allow for future expansion as the park facilities expand. Once the park is fully developed, it is proposed that this shop will house the crew and equipment for a separate "North District". This would involve the reallocation of maintenance assignments for the remaining three districts to balance the overall responsibilities and work loads for the Parks Operations Division.

In addition, high priority has been placed on the development of a new maintenance facility for the Forestry crew. This crew is presently located at Central Park in a shop that also houses the "East Maintenance District" crew. The facility is severely overcrowded and inadequate for existing operations. It is not appropriate for expansion at this location. The recommended solution is a new facility for the Forestry crew and equipment to be located within the new community park site in Park Zone 9. This is also the planned location for an additional maintenance shop for what will become the new "East Maintenance District", once that park is developed. The Central Park facility will become the "Central Maintenance District" at that time. These proposed changes provide an orderly, phased approach for support of the expanding park system. This "de-centralized" approach provides reduced travel time for crews, direct responsibility for specific parks, and an effective method to meet the growth of the park system. Also, contract maintenance of selected facilities will be incorporated into the process when it is deemed to be the most effective method to achieve the stated standards.

B. Plan Implementation

Appendix 1 provides the schedule for all currently approved capital improvement projects through Fiscal Year 2003. In addition to these projects, **Appendix 2** lists additional projects to be funded with current Park Land Dedication Fund balances. These additional projects are listed according to each Park Zone. The list will be amended as additional dedications are received. All of these projects are planned to support the priorities of this plan as well as those related issues in the City Strategic Plan.

Appendix 11 lists the specific objectives that have been established to implement the specific goals identified in **Section II** of this plan. These include projects that were already in progress or planned when the Master Plan was revised. Additional objectives will be identified and added to this plan as part of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board's annual goal-setting process. The current status of each capital improvement project and the Board's annual goals are reviewed at monthly meetings throughout the year. This helps to keep projects on schedule and maintains the focus on critical issues and the stated priorities.

The following information outlines the implementation plans for the priorities identified above:

Softball Facilities: The primary softball program needs will be met through the phased development of the Veterans Park and Athletic Complex over a period of approximately fifteen years. The first phase of development was approved in the 1998 Bond election. This project, which included two lighted adult softball fields, is now complete. A second project is being recommended for the 2003 Bond election and will focus on the completion of the first softball complex, drainage improvements, additional parking, and site work. Significant drainage improvements are required to complete the softball complex. This will provide a system to move storm water run-off from the east boundary of the park to the west side of Veterans Parkway. Also, a significant retaining wall will be required along a portion of the east boundary of the property.

Three additional fields are recommended in accordance with the approved master plan for the park, along with concession, restroom and parking facilities. These improvements are projected for completion by 2008. The concession facility is a major part of this project and is intended to ultimately provide food and beverage services for both softball complexes once the entire park is complete.

Completion of the five-field softball complex at Veterans Park will enable the adult softball program to move from Central Park, where the existing fields no longer meet the size requirements for league and tournament play. This transfer will open the four-field Central Park softball complex for use by the youth leagues. These fields are well suited for the youth activities and would strengthen the programs by offering a consolidated site for their leagues and tournaments. The existing softball fields at Bee Creek Park and Lemontree Park can then be assigned to other priority program needs. These fields are suitable for a variety of uses, including girl's softball, men's fastpitch softball, and youth baseball. It is also recommended that the field at Luther Jones Park be returned to a more suitable neighborhood use.

The development of the second softball complex at Veterans Park is projected to occur during the last phase of construction. This facility will include a four-field adult complex adjacent to the five-field complex and it would utilize the same concession facilities in that site. This project is expected to occur sometime after 2012 depending upon funding availability and future program needs. As the additional phases of this park are completed, the existing maintenance facility and staff will need to expand accordingly.

Soccer Facilities: The greatest soccer needs are for the youth programs. The recent completion of the six new adult soccer fields at Veterans Park and Athletic Complex will provide ample facilities for the adult programs for the foreseeable future. The youth programs will also utilize these same new fields. We anticipate the division of some of the six new adult fields into two youth fields as program needs are clarified. These fields, along with the existing fields located in Southwood Athletic Park, Central Park, and Anderson Park, will provide sufficient facilities for the youth and adult programs through 2010. Seven additional soccer fields, with parking and restroom facilities, are projected for Veterans Park as part of the third phase of development. The approved master plan includes thirteen adult-size soccer fields when all phases of the park are complete.

Indoor Recreation Facilities: The development of new indoor recreation facilities is recommended to be implemented as joint ventures with the College Station Independent School District whenever possible. This approach offers the best return on investment and offers the best possibility for additional grant funding. These facilities should be considered when new schools are built, as well as when old schools are renovated. Grants from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department are possible with this type of project. The next potential project could be located at the proposed elementary school located in Park Zone 10.

The future of the existing College Station Conference Center must be considered in these plans. When the new hotel/conference center project that is being developed on East University Drive is completed in 2005, the need for the existing conference center will be altered. While "local" customers mainly utilize the existing facility, the primary funding source is through the hotel/motel fund. Many of these customers will not use the new conference center, as the primary focus for the new facility will be attracting out-of-town users. Therefore, the City should consider divesting itself of the existing conference center after the new hotel/conference center facility is operational. The operational resources of the existing conference center should then be transferred to a new "community" center developed as a joint city-school project. This will provide a new facility base for existing programs and services for local residents.

The Lincoln Recreation Center is established as the City's only community center. The role of the facility has expanded over the years and it is now reaching maximum capacity for many of the programs and services currently offered at that site. The staff and the Lincoln Center Advisory Committee are in the process of revising and updating the Lincoln Center/Tarrow Park Master Plan. Preliminary recommendations for that site include the addition of more parking, expansion of the building, and additional outdoor recreation facilities. This plan revision will be complete in 2003 and funding recommendations will be submitted to the City Council for their consideration. It is anticipated that Lincoln Center will continue to expand its' role as a community center for the northern part of College Station.

Trail Acquisition and Development: Trails are projected for several locations during the next ten years, including Veterans Park and Athletic Complex, Lick Creek Park, the new community parks, and in some of the greenways. Most significant will be the Lick Creek Park trails and interpretive areas. This regional natural park will be linked to other greenways and will serve as a major destination point for the local park system. In addition, a major trail system is planned for Veterans Park and Athletic Complex. This trail system will incorporate the Veterans Memorial area with a "historical" interpretive walk and will also be linked to the existing nature trails that are part of the Texas A&M University Texas Wildlife Interpretive Collection located adjacent to the park's east boundary. Acquisition of portions of the Carter Creek Greenway may also be pursued to provide linkages to Veterans Park from the City of Bryan on the north and Carter Creek greenway to the south.

Several trails are planned in conjunction with other greenways projects throughout the City. The most significant project now underway is the Wolf Pen Creek trail system. This major urban trail system, under development in the Wolf Pen Creek Corridor, is projected to be complete by 2005. This will provide an extensive concrete path with lighting, seating and other amenities, from the Earl Rudder Freeway to the George Bush Drive bridge. This important trail will link art, cultural, residential, and commercial developments within this central community district located in Park Zone 3. Other proposed trails are identified in the approved Greenways Master Plan and the Bike Trail Master Plan.

Natural Areas: The acquisition of additional greenways will provide an extensive system of open space and natural areas for the community. Potential locations of these areas are identified and prioritized in the approved Greenways Master Plan, which is illustrated in **Map D (page I-10)**. Some areas may be acquired through fee simple donation or by means of access easements. In addition, supplemental funding for these projects may be requested from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and other sources as acquisition and development occur.

Additional financial resources will be required to meet some of these identified needs. The approval in 1998 of \$3.5 million bond funds for acquisition of greenways throughout the community provided the basis for the initial implementation of this plan. However, many of the needs identified within the plan cannot be met with those resources. Additional funds will be required. Potential sources include private donations, the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, and the Texas Department of Transportation.

Neighborhood Parks: The approval of the revised Park Land Dedication Ordinance in 1999 established, for the first time, a fee for the development and acquisition of neighborhood parks. This provision now provides for future facilities without the need for bonds or other sources of revenue. This ordinance is reviewed every three years, most recently in 2002, to ensure that the fee remains consistent with land and development costs. However, there are several areas within the community that will not benefit from this ordinance. This is due to the fact that these areas are in older neighborhoods and there is little likelihood for additional development. These locations will require additional funding to meet the needs for neighborhood park land and improvements. Sites that have been identified in this category include Shenendoah Park, Steeplechase Park, Spring Loop Park, Cypress Grove/Westfield Park, and Woodland Hills Park. These sites have land that was dedicated prior to the requirement of a development fee for park facilities.

Development of these neighborhood parks will help to address the need for additional playgrounds, basketball courts, sand volleyball courts, and shelters as stated in Section VI. Some existing neighborhood parks will require the addition of some of these facilities as well. Those parks will be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine the feasibility of additional facilities.

In addition, there are numerous existing parks that have been identified with needs to create a more intergenerational setting for users. Amenities such as benches, lighting, shade structures, and lighting are lacking and will require additional funds to install. These improvements are projected to occur on an ongoing basis, as funds are available. Current plans for some of these recommended improvements are shown in Appendix 2. Potential funding sources, in addition to Parkland Dedication Funds, include special appropriations from the annual General Fund, Community Development Funds, and in some cases, General Obligation Bond Funds.

Community Parks: Funding for the acquisition of property for one new community park site was approved in the 1998 Bond program. Acquisition of a 62-acre site located on Rock Prairie Road in Park Zone 9, was completed in 2001. The site is located adjacent to the existing landfill, which is projected to close operations by 2009. The combined acreage will provide a significant resource of approximately 250 acres for recreational purposes. The site is also contiguous with an extensive greenbelt area in the Lick Creek flood plain. This future community park will meet the needs for residents in the south and east portions of College Station. Development of this park is projected to occur within ten years. This park may include facilities such as baseball fields, tennis courts, playgrounds, volleyball courts, shelters, and group picnic pavilions. Also, this may be the most appropriate site to locate a new swimming pool facility. Additional funds will be required to develop this new site.

Community park land needs also include the minimal development of another landfill site in Park Zone 9 (**see Appendix 8d and 8e**). These projects may be excellent candidates for matching grants from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, along with land dedication and possible funding from the Brazos Valley Solid Waste Management Agency, which now owns the existing landfill. Also, approximately \$5 million is projected for the implementation of the Wolf Pen Creek Corridor including streets, drainage, trails, and other amenities. The lower trails project is projected to be complete in 2003 and the upper trails project is projected to be complete in 2004. The Wolf Pen Creek Corridor serves many of the neighborhood and community park needs for residents in Park Zone 3.

It is important to review and update this document on a regular basis. **With current growth projections, a three-year review cycle is deemed to prudent.** This will permit timely assessments of demographic shifts which may influence demand for recreation, park, and open space facilities and services. Close coordination with the implementation of other approved planning documents, such as the Greenways Master Plan, is essential to achieve success and avoid conflicting priorities. **Appendix 11** should be updated on an annual basis as projects are completed and new goals are established.

Specific projects may be selected for potential grants from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. These include Lick Creek Park, Veterans Park and Athletic Complex, the existing landfill site, and the future recreation centers. Other potential sources of funding for specific projects include the Strategic Transportation Enhancement Program, the United

States Soccer Federation, Keep Brazos Beautiful, Inc., and the Arts Council of Brazos Valley. Proposed projects will be analyzed on an ongoing basis to determine priorities for implementation, the most appropriate funding sources, and specific design features. Requests will be made as appropriate.